



Identifying and Using High-Quality Instructional Materials

The educator evaluates classroom curriculum for evidence of the leading indicators of high-quality instructional materials.

Key Method

The educator evaluates a curriculum for alignment to standards, usability of instructional supports, relevance to student populations, and assessment methods to determine whether the instructional materials are high quality and meet the needs of the districts' students and teachers.

Method Components

Why High-Quality Instructional Materials?

When educators are asked how districts should allocate resources, a majority of teachers view funding for curriculum materials and student resources as a top priority; research indicates these teachers are correct. According to the 2017 report *Hiding in Plain Sight*, "switching to more coherent, aligned curricula [can] increase achievement at relatively little extra expense or even at a cost savings" when compared to other interventions such as reducing class size. Additional research from this report highlights evidence that the selection of HQIM has a "large and statistically significant effect on student outcomes" and the "curriculum impact is largest for the weakest teachers." Stated another way, students with a less-skilled teacher who uses HQIM will have greater gains in achievement than students with a less-skilled teacher who lacks access to HQIM, especially in math.

Typically, when teachers lack access to HQIM, they resort to searching the Internet or creating their own materials to use with their students. A 2017 Rand report found that 98% of teachers use Google and 75% use Pinterest to access instructional materials. This scavenger hunt for materials and resources creates significant inequities in instructional content and delivery. According to "The Opportunity Myth" (TNTP), students who participated in the study spent more than 500 hours per school year on assignments that weren't appropriate for their grade. "Students of color, those from low-income families, English language learners, and students with mild to moderate disabilities have even less access to these resources than their peers."

Who Determines High-Quality Instructional Materials?

EdReports, one of the independent leaders in curriculum evaluation, recruits and selects highly accomplished educators to become curriculum reviewers. After receiving extensive training to determine HQIM, a team of reviewers commits 5-10 hours weekly over the span of several months to ensure every page of every resource within a curriculum is thoroughly vetted. Therefore, when educators see an EdReports rating, they can be confident the rating is



accurate based on an exhaustive and consistent review process by educators who are experts in both content and pedagogy.

Leading Indicators of High-Quality Instructional Materials

Thanks to independent organizations like EdReports, educators do not need to complete an exhaustive review of an entire curriculum; however, all educators need to have a thorough understanding of the leading indicators that contribute to HQIM:

Alignment to Standards: First and foremost, the curriculum must align to the grade/subject level standards for the content. In order to evaluate alignment, educators must be confident in their own knowledge of the standards and understand the vertical alignment of standards throughout students' K-12 education. One indicator of HQIM is the integration of multiple standards into lessons and units to allow students to see the same topics or concepts repeated with increasing complexity to reinforce and deepen prior learning.

Text Complexity: Students in most academic and elective courses use a textbook and supplemental resources to grow in their knowledge of the course content, so all educators—not just ELA teachers—need a basic understanding of three key measures of text complexity.

- **Quantitative measures:** Most publishing companies provide a grade-level readability rating determined by a computer algorithm that takes into account features such as the numbers of words and syllables in a sentence and the number of sentences in a paragraph. One of the most familiar quantitative ratings is a Lexile score.
- **Qualitative measures:** Educators evaluate text complexity using qualitative measures such as the background knowledge students need to understand the text, the use of figurative language vs. literal meaning, and unknown vocabulary.
- **Reader and task considerations:** Students' interest in the subject of the text, their background knowledge related to the text, and the reading tasks they are asked to perform are all important considerations when evaluating text complexity.

Text Features: Nonfiction texts often rely on text features to help students construct meaning. Informational texts present information using charts, tables, maps, illustrations, captions, headings, glossaries, bullet points, and a variety of fonts to organize information in ways that support students' reading comprehension and understanding of new material.

Instructional Supports: Curriculum publishers use marketing strategies to influence their target audience; however, pretty packaging does not ensure the curriculum includes evidence-based strategies and best practices for teaching the content standards. HQIM include detailed teaching plans for how teachers might structure instructional time as well as a recommended scope and sequence. HQIM also provide supplemental resources to help teachers scaffold content in ways that allow all learners to engage in grade-level instruction.



Varied Assessment Methods: Educators know that frequent progress monitoring is crucial to student achievement, so HQIM includes a variety of assessments—formative and summative—designed to accurately reflect what students know about the standards and content being taught. Formative assessments are often embedded in lessons in ways that allow teachers to monitor for understanding without interrupting the flow of lessons. Summative assessments accurately measure what students know related to the content standards and provide data points to measure growth.

Inclusive Practices: All means all. HQIM create high expectations for *all* learners—students with disabilities, English learners, gifted and talented students, economically disadvantaged students—through content that is relevant to the learner’s background and life experiences.

“There is a longstanding myth that creative lesson planning is the mark of a great teacher. A more consistent, equitable, and commonsense approach would be to relieve teachers of curriculum development responsibilities and let them focus their energy where it matters most for student outcomes—on classroom instruction.”

—Stephanie Hirsh and Jim Short, authors of *“The Elements: Transforming Teaching through Curriculum-Based Professional Learning.”*

Supporting Rationale and Research

In "The Opportunity Myth," TNTP underscores the importance of HQIM to student achievement. <https://tntp.org/publications/view/the-opportunity-myth>

"Hiding in Plain Sight: Leveraging Curriculum to Improve Student Learning"

This op-ed-style article is in response to a 2016 study conducted by the RAND Corporation on the role of teachers in creating curriculum.

<https://fordhaminstitute.org/national/commentary/failing-design-how-we-make-teaching-too-hard-mere-mortals>

This article presents findings from a nationwide scan of state laws, policies, and approaches to curriculum conducted by Chiefs for Change and the Johns Hopkins Institute for Education Policy: <https://www.chiefsforchange.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/CFC-ChoosingWisely-FINAL-1.pdf>

HMH explains to educators four indicators of HQIM for selecting comprehensive materials that meet standards and offer rich, engaging learning experiences.

<https://www.hmhco.com/blog/4-signs-of-high-quality-instructional-materials>



Wested presents the teacher's perspective of HQIM: <https://www.wested.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/resource-selecting-instructional-materials-brief-1-quality.pdf>

EdReports Resources

This resource provides educators with the trends and challenges of evaluating curriculum for culturally responsive practices. <https://www.edreports.org/resources/article/evaluating-materials-for-culturally-responsive-practices-a-landscape-analysis>

EdReports review criteria to evaluate high school ELA curriculum.

<https://cdn.edreports.org/reviewtools/ag9zfmVkcmVwb3J0cy13ZWJyIA5SB1N1YmpLY3QYGwwLEgpSZXZpZXdUb29sGOHbozoM/review-tool.pdf>

EdReports review criteria to evaluate K-12 mathematics curriculum.

<https://cdn.edreports.org/reviewtools/ag9zfmVkcmVwb3J0cy13ZWJyIA5SB1N1YmpLY3QYBQwLEgpSZXZpZXdUb29sGLH6mzsM/review-tool.pdf>

EdReports stresses the importance of high-quality professional learning and a supportive school environment in addition to HQIM.

https://www.edreports.org/resources/article/3-ways-instructional-leaders-can-support-teachers-to-use-high-quality-materials?utm_medium=email&utm_source=Pardot&utm_campaign=pd-recs-apr-2022

This link will take you EdReports resources to guide districts through the process of adopting HQIM. <https://www.edreports.org/resources/adoption-steps>

Submission Guidelines and Evaluation Criteria

To earn this micro-credential, you must receive a “passing” for Part 1 and Part 3 and “Yes” for all submissions in Part 2.

Part 1. Overview

To earn this micro-credential, respond to the following prompt:

In a written response, describe how curriculum materials are selected in your district. Include in your response:

- the steps in your district for curriculum adoption
- who participates in the selection and review process
- how the selection process is communicated to stakeholders
- how often new curriculum is purchased or reviewed
- the expectations and support for the implementation of new curriculum

This submission is scored either “passing” or “not passing.”



Passing: *Earners include a response to each part of the prompt; total response should be at least 300-words and provide adequate detail to help the scorer understand the context for your submission.*

Part 2. Artifacts/Evidence

To earn this micro-credential, submit the following artifacts:

Task 1: Evaluating your classroom curriculum

Complete the HQIM evaluation tool provided in the resource section of this micro-credential to analyze your current classroom curriculum for key indicators of HQIM. Be sure to include in your review the texts, assessments, and supplemental materials purchased by your district. Under the header "Evidence for Rating," provide a **thorough, detailed description of the evidence** you used to rate the materials (i.e., 0, 1, 2). While this is not intended to be a comprehensive review of your curriculum, you should provide enough evidence for the assessor to understand the reason for your rating of each indicator for HQIM.

Please submit the evaluation tool with the title "Task 1 Evaluation Tool" and your first initial last name.

Task 2: Analyzing your evaluation results

In a written response (300-word minimum), discuss the results of your evaluation. Your response should include the following:

- A brief summary of your overall ratings for the materials you evaluated. If any indicators scored a zero rating, discuss how the absence of that element might affect student outcomes. Highlight any indicators you identified in this curriculum that you feel are especially helpful to teachers.
- A discussion of any gaps in standards alignment. What modifications or supplemental materials might Arkansas educators need to make certain the curriculum addresses Arkansas academic standards.
- An explanation of the indicators you feel are the most important from your role within the field of education for the students you serve.

Please submit the evaluation tool with the title "Task 2 Written Response_ first initial_last name."



Part 2. Artifacts and Evidence Scoring Guide

Your artifact submissions will be assessed using the following rubric. You must earn a “Yes” for all tasks in Part 2 to earn the micro-credential.

	“Not Yet”	“Almost”	“Yes”
Task 1: Evaluating Your Classroom Curriculum	The evaluation tool is incomplete or missing.	The HQIM evaluation tool is complete for some indicators but not all OR The HQIM evaluation tool provides some or partial evidence for the rating.	The HQIM evaluation tool reflects a thorough review of the curriculum and is complete for all indicators AND The HQIM evaluation tool describes /explains the the evidence considered for each rating.
Task 2: Analyzing Your Evaluation Results	The written response is not included as evidence for the micro-credential.	The response addresses some of the bullets in the discussion prompt.	The response fully addresses all of the bullets in the discussion prompt and meets, or exceeds, the appropriate word count.

Part 3. Reflection

To earn this micro-credential, respond to the following prompt:

In a written response, reflect on what you have learned about HQIM from this micro-credential and additional resources. In your reflection, discuss the following:

- In what ways will your understanding of HQIM influence the curriculum choices you make for your students?
- How are some ways you might advocate for HQIM within your school or district?
- Given your knowledge of HQIM, do you believe the curriculum you evaluated is a good choice the students you teach?

This submission is scored either “passing” or “not passing.”

Passing: Earner includes a response to each part of the prompt; total response should be at least 250-words and provide adequate detail to help the scorer understand your future implementation of HQIM.